National Weather Service, WFO Juneau, Alaska

COOP Corner

Coffman Cove Station Up and Running!

Last spring there were tears of joy and sadness as Gary, our observer at the Coffman Cove station, retired. We rejoiced about the news of his new adventures, but cried as we lost a dedicated observer.

This spring the station was reopened with Ron taking over as the primary observer. We greatly appreciate the commitment that Ron has taken on, in addition to his already busy schedule. The Coffman Cove station collects daily maximum and minimum temperatures, rainfall, snowfall and snow depth. Ron is now part of a family of COOP's (Cooperative Observing Program). There are 35 stations in SE Alaska with thousands throughout the rest of the United States. The observations that he provides helps to serve his local community, SE Alaska, and beyond.

Ron, Coffman Cove's new observer

A special "Thank you" also goes out to Allen who continues to fill in, when needed. Great job, guys!

Special points of interest:

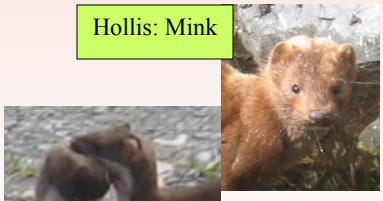
- New Observer Joins the COOP Family
- It's a Wild Life
- A Plant that Predicts the Weather
- Observers of the Month

Inside this issue:

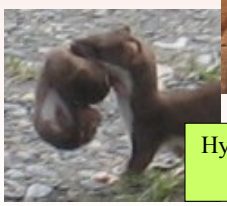
Wildlife or Wild Life...It's All In a Days Work

By: Kimberly Vaughan

I love my job, during my last trip to the southern panhandle I had the good fortune to see great people, awesome views, and cute critters. Here is a little picture peek.



Hollis: Mink



Hyder: Ermine carrying her baby

Kimberly and Cassey, surprise visit at the Ketchikan Airport

Prince of Wales: One of many fawns we saw

Kim and Caroline

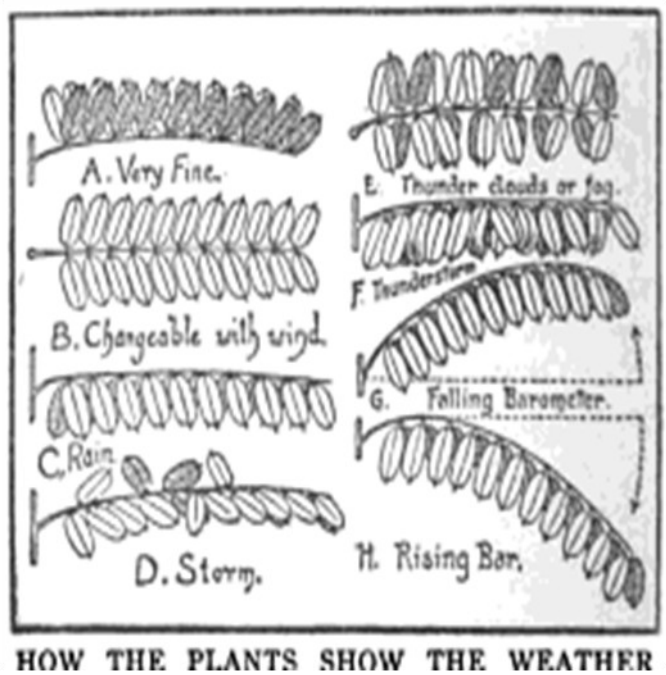
Nowack's Weather Plant—*Abrus precatorius*

By: Cory Van Pelt

Before modern weather forecasting, people looked for signals in nature that might serve as tools for weather prediction. There are many well-known examples of these folklore forecasting methods that persist today; examples being squirrel behavior and animal fur characteristics in relation to the upcoming winter, and proverbs such as the famous "red sky in the morning, sailor take warning…" Most of these folklore methods developed from loose personal observations and were never rigorously tested.

However, there is one notable exception: Nowack's Weather Plant, a tropical plant related to Acacia that is also known as Rosary Pea, among other names.

In 1888, London newspapers carried several stories about this mysterious plant as it was being studied in Vienna, Austria by a scientist named Joseph Nowack. In the August 30th, 1888 edition of the *St. James Gazette*, the following article appeared: "*The 'weather plant' continues to excite considerable interest at Vienna. Men of science, who on its first discovery were unwilling to express an opinion on its prognosticating virtues, now agree, after extensive experiments, that the shrub is in truth prophetic. Thirty- two thousand trials made during the last three years tend to prove its infallibility. The plant itself is a legume, commonly called the 'Paternoster-pea,' but known in botany as the Abrus peregrinus. It is a native of Corsica and Tunis. Its leaf and twig strongly resemble those of the acacia. The more delicate leaves of its upper branches foretell the state of the weather forty-eight hours in advance, while its lower and hardier leaves indicate all atmospheric changes three days beforehand. The indications consist in a change in the position of the leaves and in the rise and fall of the twigs and branchlets.*"



HOW THE PLANTS SHOW THE WEATHER

From *Current Literature*, 1908

On October 12, 1888, a patent was issued to Professor Nowack for an apparatus containing a weather plant that consisted of glass sides with ventilation. Nowack claimed that special conditions were required for the plant to act as a weather forecaster; simply growing them would not do the trick. According to his patent application, the plants required a temperature of at least 72 Fahrenheit, access to air while blocking out wind, and protection from direct sun, all of which were attained with his plant container.

According to Nowack, the ages of the leaves determined their forecast "area of responsibility". Older leaves, at the bottom of the plant, indicated weather for the local area (within 5 miles). The youngest leaves provided forecasts for a 50 mile radius.

(Continued on page 3)

Continued: Nowack's Weather Plant—*Abrus precatorius*

In 1890, an article titled "The Weather Plant" was published in the British *Bulletin of Miscellaneous Information*, in which Frances W. Oliver at the Royal Gardens reported his findings from an extensive study of several plant specimens. Professor Nowack also submitted several forecasts to Mr. Oliver for him to verify. After two months of study, Mr. Oliver proposed that the leaves simply responded to differing light levels, temperature, and humidity, and that he found no correlation between the plant's behavior and the subsequent weather, concluding "…I contend that all the movements exhibited by the leaves of *Abrus precatorius* depend on the causes not so far to seek as those suggested by Mr. Nowack." On September 14, 1906, an article appeared in the *New York Times*, in which Professor Nowack "declares he is able to forecast atmospheric and seismic disturbances by means of a small plant, earlier and for a wider area than the regular Government Weather Bureaus…" He had already established his own forecasting service in London using 1,400 of his plants, and sent 1,000 to New York with the intent of creating a U.S. forecast service (as far as I can tell, this never came to fruition).

So, were Nowack's plants really able to forecast the weather? Online information about Joseph Nowack and his forecasting services ran dry after the 1906 New York Times article, so it is unknown what became of it all. Being scientifically oriented, I approach the subject with curious skepticism, as there's no logical reason why a plant would have evolved the ability to move its leaves in response to weather 3 days away unless it was related to a clear self-defense mechanism, which doesn't appear to be the case.

I've tracked down seeds of the famous "forecaster" and will be planting them for experimentation so we can find out for ourselves. I will be reporting on their progress in future newsletters, so stay tuned! It should be noted that the plant's seeds are *extremely poisonous*! People have reportedly died simply from pricking their finger with a needle while passing it through a seed for jewelry.

Obtaining seeds or plants for yourself is strongly discouraged.

From *Köhler's Medizinal-Pflanzen* onWikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abrus_precatorius

Hooray for Hollis-Observer of the Month for March

Donna

Hollis station has had a rocky past, until last year when the Inter-Island Ferry Authority stepped up. Donna is the primary observer, but all of the staff that work in Hollis share in the responsibilities of ensuring the daily observations are taken.

They do a great job with no missing data. The observations are done on time and entered into WxCoder.

A big thanks goes out to the Hollis crew.

Great Job Gustavus-Observer of the Month for April

The Gustavus Observer is a dedicated person that collects the weather data every day and enters it into WxCoder. She does this on top of her many other hats she wears. Chris and her husband have been doing a superb job, since the station was established back in 2003. Chris is always excited about weather and eager to learn more about it.

Keep up the great weather work!


John and Chris

Let's make sure we get a clear picture of the lovely couple next trip

The breeze, the trees, the honey bees
All volunteers!

Juliet Carinreap

Those who can, do.
Those who can do more, volunteer.

Author Unknown

I can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks.

William Shakespeare

It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference.

Tom Brokaw

WxCoder 101

Most of you are using WxCoder and doing a splendid job. We have been noticing a few minor things that we would like to give a bit of refresher training.

1. Fill in all weather elements that you record. This also means to fill in the snowfall and snow depth, even in the middle of summer. The ensures that the data is interpreted as a zero value and not a missing value.

2. Enter "M" when data is missing. Enter a "T" for Trace.

3. If the precipitation total is more than for one day, make sure to use the drop down box to indicate how many day total the precipitation total is.

4. Review your monthly form making sure that the data entered is the same data written on your paper form. Lastly, close the form by the 5th of each month. Closing the form is your electronic signature.

5. If taking the observation at a time other than your scheduled time, enter the time that the observation was actually taken. This helps with keeping the data collected accurate.

Photos from the Field

Spring has sprung, or not? **Left:** March crocus' in Elfin Cove.

Right: A few days later they are under an inch of snow.

I just love the pictures I get from Ken out at Shelter Island it's the next best thing to getting to live there.

Observer Spotlight-Kimberly writing about Kimberly

Nikki thought that it would be a great idea to have everyone get to know me just a bit better. Since she is pretty darn persuasive, here is Kimberly's short story.

I was born and raised in Portland Oregon. After graduating High School, I got married to my High School Sweetheart and joined the Navy.

I served in the Navy for 10 years, getting to travel to Florida, Illinois, Cuba, Mississippi, and Texas. I got the honor of serving on the USS Lexington for a year and half before being decommissioned.

At the end of my Navy adventure, I was hired by the National Weather Service out at the Cold Bay office. From there I went to Yakutat and finally to Juneau. I feel very fortunate to have been able to live and experience the bush life. I believe, I have a deeper appreciation and respect for those places and the people that live there. In short, I have been working in weather for over 20 years and still love it!

During all these moves, the one constant has been my wonderful husband, Larry. We have a daughter, Miranda who is a Senior in High School.

Larry, Kimberly and Miranda

As if I didn't have enough things to keep me busy, I thought it would be fun and useful to go back to college. Next spring, I will graduate from UAS with a Computer Programming degree.

In my spare time, I like to hike, kayak, build things, and I'm attempting to restore a car.

For you car people out there, she's a 55 Ford Crown Victoria.

Our Sweet Mollee Dog

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If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this or any other COOP matter, please feel free to contact us.

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